THOUGHTS FOR THE TIMES[1]

MR. PRESIDENT, MEMBERS OF THE CLASS,
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

IT is a distinct pleasure to me to come to this city where the infancy of Texas was cradled and participate in these exercises whose meaning is the graduation of Texas sons and daughters from the halls of a great Texas university into the walks of useful professions and pursuits. It is a far cry from that historic time which in these precincts marked the beginning of the Texas Republic, to this equally historic time which in occasions like this marks in such measure the fulfilment of the dream of the large-visioned men in whose heroism it was founded. Between the two periods has rolled the stream of mighty events, those things in which the life of the Commonwealth has been translated, and by which it has been thus far advanced. We are come now to the season of the maturing of its powers, the time of the fruition of the forces that set it upon its high career and dedicated it to its lofty aims. All about us we see this final attainment of its strength—in the broad reaches of cultivated land, the widened currents of commerce, the increased development of natural resource, in the diversified teeming industry whose busy hum mingles with the music of the air. But above all, we see it in a quickened and larger interest in the education of the youth of the State, which throughout its whole extent expresses the common resolution of a great

[1] Address delivered by Nelson Phillips, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Texas, at the third commencement convocation of the Rice Institute, held Monday morning, June 10, 1918, at nine o'clock.

people that every Texas boy and girl, whatever their station or circumstance, shall have the full opportunity of entering life disciplined and trained for its contests, seasoned for its struggles, with the uplifted crest of those who are prepared and ready for its issues and upon whose brow sits the promise of success. Nothing so well bespeaks the mighty spirit of Texas as this. Of nothing may we as a citizenship be more proud. In nothing have we better kept faith with the sacrifice of the fathers. By no nobler token may we worthily salute the fadeless memory of the martyrs of Goliad and the Alamo and the heroes of San Jacinto.

A monument to that resolution as it filled the life of one great-hearted man, as it interpreted his love for the State and its youth, and inspired the gift of his fortune for their benefit, is this splendid institute. In its broad foundation, its general provision, the amplitude of its curriculum, the broad scope of its purpose and intent, it is typical of the State, and is one of those few things which we may truly say are commensurate with its future. How fitting it is that this historic soil which was the breeding-ground of the patriotism that brought the Commonwealth into being, should be the abode of this splendid seat of learning, a training-ground for its youth, where shall be equally lighted the fires of exalted effort for worthy lives in which the State may renew itself and its free, independent, and invincible spirit be preserved!

These commencement occasions always have a deep appeal for me. They signify more than we sometimes realize. They mark an epoch in these young lives—that time portentous with human interest and carrying within its womb the issues of human welfare, which denotes for young men and young women all over the land the surrender of the things of their youth, the laying aside of the character of

those who are merely preparing for the activities of the world, and their entrance, now, into its rude stream, to battle with its treacherous currents, to assume its stern duties, to become dedicated to its relentless and unending, and yet its noble, God-given, tasks. They go, now, into the great arena, into the thick of the smoke and dust of its conflict, into the moil and toil of its labors, into the stress and storm of its passions, into the fierce crucible of eternal forces,—the mighty touchstone of God for his creatures, by which he puts them to the test. There they will walk in the shadow sometimes, but if they are worthy, just as often in the light. There they will feel the sting of defeat sometimes, but if they are strong, just as often the elation of victory. There they will see with unclouded eyes the weakness, the depravity, the imperfections of humankind, all the stark and naked wretchedness which under the wise decree of Providence is a necessary part of human lot; but oftener, if they are true, will they look upon, in all their splendid proportion, the charity, the kindness, and the goodness in humankind—those unconquerable virtues which redeem it, preserve the balance of human happiness, and make of human life a broad and stately highway, marked by the milestones of exalted action and reaching unto the throne of God. There, finally, they will fail or succeed—sink into the sombre silences of those who miss the goal and whom the world heartlessly passes by and cruelly forgets; or rise to the heights of memorable achievement, blessing the world by what they have wrought, leaving behind them the useful lessons of a life finely used and honorably lived, and crowning its high purposes with the enduring glories of a good name.

It is reflections like these which well give a thoughtful man some pause as to what he may say with propriety and

in briefness to graduates of a university as they are about to go out to meet their great experience.

I have never altogether enjoyed the office of giving advice. Most of the addresses of this kind that I have listened to in my time mainly consisted of that. It was wholesome advice, for the quality of advice is always to be wholesome. At least they who give it generally think so. But while it was wholesome enough, like lots of things that are wholesome, it was somewhat tedious. It was like some diets the doctors prescribe—good for the patient but hard on him at the same time, illustrating the pith of Bacon's remark about new laws—which proved how wise a man he was—when he said they are like apothecaries' drugs; they remedy the disease, but trouble the body. Too many men give advice with a complacency and self-satisfaction as large as Martin Luther's when he said with more conceit than reverence, "God Almighty cannot get along without wise men."

One of the best things a man can do in his life is "to here and there put in the hands of the youth of his country a light which will burn after his own individual taper is extinguished." I do not feel that I can do that, but I would like to do it with you.

I have not concerned myself for a subject upon which to address you. There was no need that I should. Its nature comes unbidden. This event with its large consequence to these young men and women, these halls templing the wisdom of the enervated names that like beacons have lighted the long and tortuous pathway of the world, this atmosphere about us which breathes the brooding care of a noble academy for its children as they go out from its charge, all furnish inevitable theme to any man whose heart beats for his fellow-men and who would speak to them in the terms and sympathy of that brotherhood. I care not how it be phrased

or what name it bears. If it be a true message, it will be in the end simply of those influences whose power it is to touch the lives of men with hope, put in their hands in this tremendous hour the rod and staff of a great purpose whereby they may be useful to the world and truly typify the character of their land, give them the strength to be steadfast amid all-encircling gloom, and bring them at last to the foot of the hill with that peace which contents the final hours of those whose toil, whether famed or obscure, has been a benediction to mankind,—that peace which faces with calmness and serenity the breaking of the eternal dawn.

To help provide, to nurture, to foster, to keep pure those influences in the life of the people, and hence in the life of the State and the Nation, is the great work of education. That is why the school is a place of such responsibility, the teacher a man of such high obligation. That is why a university is a seat of trust and power, why it should be always nothing less than a free fountain of living waters. That is why in this time of all times, when we are having our Babel of ideas just as truly as the ancients had their Babel of tongues, it should be the undefiled altar of inviolate truth. That is why in this restless hour of change it should be the citadel for the protection, and not an enemy arsenal for the destruction, of those great principles upon which this Republic was founded, which have given us liberty and constitutional government, the richest, rarest possession any people have owned in all time,—that priceless thing whose loss to this Nation would be the knell of its doom, marking in all its vast tragedy the failure of men to govern themselves and their last effort on this earth to be free. That is why it should be now in this time of national peril the sanctuary of the Americanism and the Democracy of this land, not the Americanism of the narrow, carping doctrinaire with his dis-

tempered empty dreams, his base dogmas of discontent, his vapid mouthings, and his futile plans for reducing all men to the spurious level of a commonplace mediocrity and an ignoble indolence; nor that of the spineless "conscientious objector," with his valiant code of courage and his pale, limp, and puny sense of duty; nor that of the greedy, smooth, and oily profiteer, coining the suffering of a nation into paltry riches and like a vulture plucking at its vitals as it lies a Prometheus manacled upon the rock; but the Americanism, thank God, of Washington, Franklin, and Robert Morris, of Light-Horse Harry Lee and Greene and Sumter, Marion and Paul Jones, who had just begun to fight,—the Americanism of those clear-eyed, clean-limbed young heroes who are swarming across the seas for the relief of a stricken world, and are now treading the fiery edge of battle for the honor of the Nation and the life of humanity. Not the Democracy of the selfish, shriveled Socialist, with his doctrines based on envy that makes his heart "wither at another's joy and hate an excellence he cannot reach," with his creed of spoliation and plunder of those who have succeeded in the world simply because they have succeeded, a creed of bondage and slavery in its denial to men, the poor and the well-to-do alike, of the right to own and enjoy the just rewards of their toil,—the reverse of man's God-given liberty to work and possess the fruits of his labors; but the Democracy of the sturdy American patriot, who finds a pride in his neighbor's success and holds it contemptible to covet; who spurns the notion that he is cast in such feeble mould as to be a servile suppliant for governmental bounty which he knows can only be bestowed by taxes wrung from his fellows; who scorns a special privilege and demands only justice that is equal and exact; who is unwilling that in this land any class should profit at the expense or suffer at the hands

of any other class, and hence refuses to recognize that there are any classes here save those of honest men and false men, good men and bad men; whose concern for his country is not expressed in some advantage for himself, but that its laws remain equal, and all men, both high and low, equal before them; and who asks only that he be left a freeman; free to work and to toil with all his strength, because God did not disdain to labor and gave it to man as the great field for his powers; free to mingle with it some play; free to be provident and saving and bless wife and children with his thrift; free to live his life and think and voice worthy, unfettered thoughts; free to stand upon the sunlit hills of God's universe, with the freshness of the morning upon his brow and feel the surge of eager blood from a clean heart and know that he has a freeman's rights and a freeman's opportunity, and that while the world will mock him if he sits in the shade with folded hands, it is his to conquer by a freeman's will and a true man's effort.

Those who leave a college speak of it as their Alma Mater. That is now a commonplace expression. I wonder if we realize always what a noble term it is, what a singular endearment it voices,—*our fostering mother.* A fostering mother! What a fine relation is that for a great institution of learning to bear to all those who throughout the years have learned wisdom at her feet and have gone out into the world sustained by her strength and inspired by her lofty example! What a solace to have that great heart to turn to for guidance and comfort, as Matthew Arnold, after his life's warfare against the Philistines of his day, turned with broken body and tired mind to Oxford and found there the peace of his life,—Oxford, "spreading its gardens to the moonlight, and whispering from its towers the last enchantments of the Middle Ages!"

While Oxford is upon my lips, let me remind you of the memorable share it has had in this war. Before the war, its undergraduates numbered 3200. There are now only 300, composed entirely of wounded soldiers, foreigners, and men rejected for physical disability. Of the 11,500 Oxford men in the English armies, 15 have been awarded the Victoria Cross, 314 the Distinguished Service Order, 983 the Military Cross, 1600 have been mentioned for gallantry in despatches, and 2100 have been killed. The part Cambridge has played is no less notable. The universities of Texas, including Rice, the universities of America in every State, are matching this proud and tragic achievement. Let those who scoff at broad and liberal education stand mute and shamed before this heroic, this resplendent record!

What are the things which the universities, which we as a people, need now chiefly to foster? Above all, I would answer, the stalwart fibre, the rugged independence, the manly courage, the simple habits of the Anglo-Saxon stock. If we maintain these, we will maintain with them Anglo-Saxon freedom; and with Anglo-Saxon freedom the happiness of this people is secure. It brought the nation into being. Only by it can it live. Without it, it will have and will deserve no better fate than to perish from the face of the earth and rest in the broken sepulchres of forgotten peoples who, in their self-conceit and the worship of false idols, threw away their liberties and paid the penalty of that crime with the end of national existence.

No truer saying was ever spoken than that "luxury is the displacement of life." Before this war we were fast becoming a luxury-loving people—not all of us, but too many of us for safety. With steam, our varied and vast machines, with the forces of electricity, we were making life too automatic; and in that same degree we were sapping it of its vitality and

robbing it of its simplicity and innate strength. Strength never expresses itself in finery. It scorns all idle trappings which are for show. Individual life will war with constant repression. It becomes stagnant and inert when subdued to a monotonous routine. It craves freedom of action, and that it will have, either in its higher or its lower forms. This is an age of machines, it is true; but let us beware of any effort or tendency which reduces men anywhere to that dull level. We have been going at too rapid a pace and living under too high a tension. We see that in young men quickly grown old and in some of our seniors enervated before their time. Speed is all right in its place, but I prefer not to regard life as a spasm. My observation is that they make more of it and get more out of it who move through it, not with sloth or ease, but with patience and composure, with the sure, even stride which bespeaks resolution, will, and steady industry.

We have made life more varied, perhaps richer in some things and fuller in others. But have we made it any happier or more useful than when it was freer and simpler? Let each man appraise it for himself. But when I think of the man of strength and fearlessness I want my boy to be, I find myself turning to the noble, rugged figure of the American pioneer. And when I think of the people I would like for us always to be, I conceive a people of simplicity of manners, of habit, simplicity of speech and simplicity of life; a people "invincible alike to evil fortune and to good"; frugal, honest, and sincere; not unadapted nor unused to the wholesome pleasures of the world, but to whom its vanities do not appeal and whom its follies cannot corrupt.

One of the finest pictures in all the Bible is that of Samson carrying off upon his shoulders the ponderous gates of the city of Gaza—overcoming by his natural strength that

which would imprison him. Our strength must be our reliance if we are to prevail over the base and sordid things of this life.

Many things have altered, and will further be shifted, turned, and modified in this world; but remember this, the theory of human conduct has never changed and never will. Science is a wonderful force. It has revised for us the whole theory of matter. But it is powerless to revise even one of the eternal verities by which human conduct is to be tested. They are immutable because they constitute the changeless code of right and wrong—the one stable thing of this world, to whose laws we are bound by a never ending obligation and which are to justify us or condemn us as we, ourselves, shall will. The supreme task of education, in whose performance it succeeds or fails, is, as a wise man once declared it, simply "to make knowledge and conduct go hand in hand, that wisdom and character may be the true reflections of each other."

This was impressed upon me one time in a singular way, for in this incident I witnessed how the knowledge which education imparts may be wholly vain in its influence, and how necessary it is, not merely that its knowledge be gained, but that it be effectual in its controlling power. I met a young student once, bright, well read, but not well informed, and full of spirit. In our conversation he rather eagerly turned to the subject of government, for the reason, I suppose, that he was full of it. Presently, he announced with some emphasis and no little assurance that he did not believe in a constitution. I knew then that his knowledge and his conduct were diverging. I asked him, "Why?" He replied, "For the reason that *it too often gets in the way*. We have a fast growing state, in need of development; and whenever we start to do something worth while, we find the Constitu-

tion forbids it." I answered that I was glad he had assigned that as his reason. At this, he expressed surprise and wanted to know why I had said that. I replied that it was because I had heard many men in my time object to the Ten Commandments for the same reason. Then I reminded him that the Constitution never gets in the way of the man who subscribes and lives up to it, which is the patriot's constant duty, and that it was intended to get in the way of every other kind of man. He left me with a different—and, I trust, a truer—idea of the Constitution. I believe I did him the service which his school had not done, of bringing his knowledge and his thought into harmony with each other. I saved him, I think, from the bitter fate of starting out into his active life with the back of his hand to one of the imperishable institutions of his country, from rebellion against the finest conception of the human mind,—that the sovereignty of the people shall live and rule in organic law for the government of themselves and the protection to every man of those great rights which we call by the name of liberty.

The preservation for our children of these vast ideas in which men have expressed their nobler selves is one of the fine duties of the age. It is an odd paradox, yet we are always faced with the truth of it, that somehow those things which have most blessed the world are the product of conflict, and in turn seem always to have to battle for their lives. This but expresses the strange perverseness of mankind. We must be tolerant with it, for it is that which for a deep purpose is mixed in us all—poor human frailty; and for it there is no ultimate cure but charity. But I do not believe in being too indulgent with it, particularly in ourselves. And as applied to ourselves we should always remember the Parable of the Bramble. You will recall that one time, when the trees went out to anoint a king among themselves to rule

over them, the useful, busy trees all refused the office, the Fig-tree, the Olive, and the Vine in turn declining it. It therefore went begging—a strange thing for an office to do even in that time. It was finally offered to the Bramble. He eagerly assumed it, and promptly declared that his policy would be to cut down the Cedars of Lebanon.

My young friends, I have detained you with this desultory address too long. As you go into the splendid opportunities of life, make of yourselves, I pray you, fine centres of faith, high purpose, and worthy deed, radiating a usefulness by which you can best repay your obligation to this, your great fostering mother. Love good books and cherish them. If it be our fate that a fickle public taste has banished the plays of Shakespeare, do not exile him from your mind. Infuse into your natures the robustness, the independence, the sincerity of old Samuel Johnson, even if he was a Tory and did declare that the first Whig was the devil. Burke, the greatest Whig of his own or of any time, venerated him and loved him. Be not a type of that idle, aimless man of whom, as a wit expressed it, about all the preacher could say at his funeral was that he was the first man at a fire. Be not merely "a brilliant ineffectuality." Be the kind Carlyle said Walter Scott was—the kind that, when he departed this earth, took a man's life along with him. If the snows of winter descend upon your head, keep summer always in your heart. It is the grateful season. Strive with all your might, even though it be with aching hands and under a burning sky. Work, everywhere and in every station, is noble. You may put your life in it with the certainty that you will realize the blessedness of it. I bid you each and all a high and honorable career.

NELSON PHILLIPS.